

Stylin' the ADPH Way: Understanding the New ADPH Written and Verbal Communication Standards

**Satellite Conference and Live Webcast
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Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
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Faculty

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Why Does ADPH Need a Standard for Communication?

The Vision Statement for ADPH states in part that our purpose is "...to provide caring, high quality, and professional services for the improvement and protection of the public's health..."

Policy for Written and Verbal Communication Policy 2008-007

- Adopted by the department in November 2008
- To be used as a reference tool for employees
- Standardized format for all ADPH employees

General Guidelines

- ADPH uses The Gregg Reference Manual for general guidance on the basic rules for written business correspondence.
- The Tenth Edition is the current edition being used by the department.

General Guidelines

- Bureau, area, and county office managers are responsible for maintaining a current edition at the work site.
- Correspondence must be proofread.
- Reliance on grammar and spell-check computer functions is not enough.

General Guidelines

- The Elements of Style is a good reference book to ensure correspondence is written clearly, concisely, and without errors in grammar and syntax.
- Bureaus, public health areas, and county offices should develop a review and approval process for correspondence directed to parties outside the department.

General Guidelines

- Several staff members may be selected to serve as reviewers.
- Prior review and approval is required by the Bureau Director, Area Administrator, or designee, for all correspondence submitted for the State Health Officer's signature.

Things to Consider When Preparing Correspondence

- Be complete
- Be clear
- Be concise
- Be specific and concrete
- Be conversational, not stuffy
- Be your own best proofreader then ask a coworker to proofread your work

Things to Consider When Preparing Correspondence

- After the content is written and edited, review it to check the following:
 - Spelling
 - Mechanics
 - Punctuation
 - Grammar

Absolute Commas

- There are times when absolute commas should be used:
 - Between the day and year in a date expression
 - Example: June 1, 2008
 - Between city and state or country
 - Example: Montgomery, Alabama
 - Example: Beijing, China

Absolute Commas

- Before *and* or *but* when it separates complete ideas
 - Example: The meeting began with a lot of debate, but people left.
- Between items in a series
 - Example: Refreshments were served before, during, and after the meeting.

Absolute Commas

- After introductory phrases of three or more words
- Example: On June 1, 2008, Dr. Williamson was determined to complete the correspondence guidelines.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- Standard Letter Items
 - Letterhead
 - Date
 - Inside Address
 - Salutation
 - Message (Text)
 - Complimentary Closing
 - Signature Block
 - Reference Initials

Basic Business Letter Construction

- All correspondence related to ADPH business should be prepared on ADPH letterhead.
- ADPH letterhead should not be used for correspondence that does not relate directly to ADPH business.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- Position the content of your letter so it balances well with the ADPH letterhead.
 - Use the preview feature of the word processing program to:
 - Ensure a longer letter fits neatly on the page.
 - Position a short letter neatly on the page.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- Determine how much of a letter should be carried over to a second page.
- Font
 - A professional business font should be used.
 - Fonts smaller than 11 point are discouraged.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- Margins
 - One inch top, one inch bottom, one inch left, and one inch right
- The top margin will need to be adjusted for letterhead.
- Margins may be adjusted to lengthen a short letter or to make a two-page letter fit onto one page.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Adjusting the Length of a Letter**
 - To spread a short letter (under eight lines of text) over one page, the writer may:
 - Increase the side margins.
 - Increase the font size to no more than 12 point.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Adjusting the Length of a Letter**
 - Insert extra space above the inside address, the signature line, and the reference initials; however, do not use more than twice the recommended space in each case.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Adjusting the Length of a Letter**
 - To condense a long letter (over 23 lines of text), the writer may:
 - Decrease the side margins.
 - Decrease the font size to no smaller than 11 point.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Adjusting the Length of a Letter**
 - Reduce the space between the date and the inside address to two blank lines.
 - Reduce the space for the signature from three blank lines to two blank lines.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Date**
 - The date is centered, at least one-half inch below the letterhead.
 - The correct date format throughout the letter is June 1, 2008.
 - Do not use abbreviations in the date.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Date**
 - Avoid slash and hyphen dates.
 - Example: 4/10/08 or 4-10-08
 - Military/genealogy style (1 June 2008) should not be used for “civilian” business.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Inside Address**
 - The inside address begins at the left margin, on the fourth line below the date.
 - Avoid abbreviations other than those printed on the letterhead or envelope of your addressee.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Inside Address**
 - Use the standard U.S. Postal Service abbreviations for states – two letters, all caps.
 - Whenever possible, use the four-digit zip code extension.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Inside Address**
 - Make a point of spelling proper names accurately.
 - Call to verify if unsure of the correct spelling.
 - Do not rely on spell-check.
 - Call to verify if unsure whether the recipient is male or female.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Inside Address**
 - As a general rule, use a title before the name of the person.
 - Use Mr., Ms., Mrs., or Miss if the person does not have a specific title such as Dr., The Honorable, etc.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Inside Address**
 - It is the State Health Officer's preference to use credentials after the name, with no title before the name.
 - Example:
Donald E. Williamson, M.D.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Inside Address**
 - Addressing a letter to Dr. Donald E. Williamson, M.D., would be incorrect.
 - Call to verify the addressee's proper title, if you are unsure.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Salutation**
 - The salutation begins on the second line below the inside address, at the left margin, and is followed by a colon.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Subject Line**
 - If used, the subject line begins on the second line below the salutation, at the left margin, and is followed by a colon.
 - “RE” or “Subject” may be used.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Message (Text)**
 - The message or text of the letter begins on the second line below the subject line.
 - If no subject line is used, begin on the second line below the salutation.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Message (Text)**
 - Paragraphs in business correspondence should begin at the left margin (or the first line of each paragraph may be indented one-half inch).
 - Paragraphs are single spaced with a double space between each paragraph.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Message (Text)**
 - Avoid right justification of paragraphs so they do not look like form letters.
 - A business letter should be limited to one page, if at all possible.
 - A good average length of a business letter paragraph is three to five sentences.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Message (Text)**
 - The first or last paragraph of a business letter (a courtesy comment) often has only one or two sentences.
 - If you have any questions, please call me at (334) 206-5200.
 - It is our pleasure to serve you and your employees.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Continuation Page**
 - If the letter must be carried over to the second page, carry over **MORE** than one or two lines of message plus the closing.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Continuation Page**
 - Identify the second page with three lines as follows:

Mr. and Mrs. John Public

Page 2

June 1, 2008

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Continuation Page**
 - The continuation header begins at the left margin, one inch below the top of the page.
 - Use plain bond paper for continuation pages.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Continuation Page**
 - Continue the message of the letter on the third line below the continuation header.
- **Complimentary Closing**
 - The complimentary closing begins on the second line below the last line of the message.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Complimentary Closing**
 - Begin the complimentary closing at the center point of the letter.
 - Capitalize only the first word of the closing, and follow the closing with a comma.
 - Example: Yours truly,

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Complimentary Closing**
 - The preferred professional closing for ADPH business correspondence is
Sincerely,

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Signature Block**
 - The signature block begins on the fourth line below the complimentary closing to allow room for the handwritten signature.
 - Type the full name on the first line.
 - Type the business title, if used, on the next line.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Signature Block**
 - Short titles may immediately follow the name on the first line.
 - Example: Rick Harris, Director
Bureau of Health Provider
Standards
 - The State Health Officer prefers his signature block to be as follows:
 - Donald E. Williamson, M.D.
State Health Officer

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Signature Block**
 - For all ADPH correspondence, begin the signature block at the center point of the page.
 - When using letterhead, it is not necessary to include the name of the organization in the signature block.
 - It is acceptable to include the organization name in the typed contact information of an e-mail.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Reference Initials**
 - The reference initials begin on the second line below the signature block, at the left margin.
 - Use reference initials to indicate who composed the letter and/or who produced the printed letter.
 - Example: DEW/MJ

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Reference Initials**
 - When a letter is generated for the State Health Officer's signature, it is the department's preference to include his initials, along with initials of the author and typist.
 - Example: DEW/SW/MZ

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Enclosure/Attachment Notation**
 - The enclosure/attachment notation, if used, begins one line below the reference initials, at the left margin.
 - Type "Attachment(s)" or "Enclosure(s)" to indicate other items in the envelope.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Enclosure/Attachment Notation**
 - If this type of notation is needed, use the definitions below to ensure the correct notation is inserted:
 - An attachment is any document that is attached, by paper clip or staple, to the letter.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Enclosure/Attachment Notation**
 - An enclosure is any document that is inserted in the same envelope with the letter but is not attached.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Copy Notation**
 - The copy notation (cc:), if used, begins one line below the enclosure/attachment notation, at the left margin, and is followed by a colon.
 - If no enclosure/attachment notation is used, type the copy notation one line below the reference initials.

Basic Business Letter Construction

- **Copy Notation**
 - Some authors use *c*, *pc*, or *Copy to*.
 - It is the department's preference to use *cc* to indicate one or more persons will be sent a copy of the letter.

ADPH Memo Standards

- While letters are used for external correspondence, memos are used for internal correspondence.
- The standard top margin of a memo is two inches; however, this can be reduced to eliminate the need for a continuation page.

ADPH Memo Standards

- Memos should have the heading **MEMORANDUM** or **Memo**.
- There is no preference for spacing, underlining, or capitalization.
- The heading begins at the left margin.

ADPH Memo Standards

- All memos should have the following guide words:
 - TO:
 - THROUGH: (if applicable)
 - FROM:
 - DATE: (June 1, 2008, format)
 - SUBJECT:

ADPH Memo Standards

- All guide words start at the left margin and are followed by a colon.
- There are two returns between each of the guide words.
- If a memo is through or from multiple staff, each staff member should be listed and should initial by their name to indicate approval.

ADPH Memo Standards

- Message (Body)
 - The message of the memo begins on the second or third line below the last guide word.
 - Paragraphs begin at the left margin (or the first line of each paragraph may be indented one-half inch).

ADPH Memo Standards

- Message (Body)
 - Paragraphs are single spaced with a double space between each paragraph.

ADPH Memo Standards

- Continuation Page
 - If a memo continues to the second page, identify the second page with three lines as follows:
 - Donald E. Williamson, M.D.
 - Page 2
 - June 1, 2008

ADPH Memo Standards

- Continuation Page
 - The continuation header begins at the left margin, one inch below the top of the page.
 - Continue the message of the memo on the third line below the continuation header.

ADPH Memo Standards

- **Reference Initials**
 - The reference initials begin on the second line below the last line of the message, at the left margin.
 - Use reference initials to indicate who composed the memo and/or who produced the printed memo.
 - Example: DEW/MJ

ADPH Memo Standards

- **Reference Initials**
 - When a memo is generated from the State Health Officer, it is the department's preference to include his initials, along with initials of the author and typist.
 - Example: DEW/SW/MZ

ADPH Memo Standards

- **Enclosure/Attachment Notation**
 - The enclosure/attachment notation, if used, begins one line below the reference initials, at the left margin.
 - Type "Attachment(s)" or "Enclosure(s)" to indicate other items in the envelope.

ADPH Memo Standards

- **Enclosure/Attachment Notation**
 - If this type of notation is needed, use the definitions below to ensure the correct notation is inserted:
 - An attachment is any document that is attached, by paper clip or staple, to the memo.

ADPH Memo Standards

- **Enclosure/Attachment Notation**
 - An enclosure is any document that is inserted in the same envelope with the memo but is not attached.

ADPH Memo Standards

- **Copy Notation**
 - The copy notation (cc:), if used, begins one line below the enclosure/attachment notation, at the left margin, and is followed by a colon.
 - If no enclosure/attachment notation is used, type the copy notation one line below the reference initials.
 - Some authors use *c*, *pc*, or *Copy to*.

ADPH Memo Standards

- **Copy Notation**
 - It is the department's preference to use **cc** to indicate one or more persons will be sent a copy of the memo.